Mobilising the Leadership of Cities and Regions in the 21st Century

Paper Presented to the RSA Winter Conference
London, 22 November 2013
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The Place-Based Leadership Agenda

• The Deficit in the Leadership of Cities and Regions
  – Why Leadership Matters

• What Do we Know About Leadership in Cities and Regions?
  – Is Good Leadership Universal?
  – How Can Leadership be Mobilised?
  – Case Studies and their Limitations

• Conclusions
The Leadership Deficit

- Regional or place-based leadership is deficient in many developed economies
  - Hildreth and Bailey (2013) noted that UK cities and regions have lagged behind their European comparators because of leadership gaps
  - The Centre for Cities (2006) argues cities and regions ‘have their hands tied’ with respect to economic development because of reliance on central government funding
  - OECD (2010) considered inadequate leadership a cause of poor regional performance in some territories
  - Beer and Baker (2013) noted the absence of leaders in parts of rural Australia
  - Halkier (2013) observed ‘lock in’ and leadership failure in two of his three case studies in the tourism industry in Jutland
  - Sotarauta and Kosonen (2004) reported that South-Ostrobothian in Finland had to ‘import’ leadership to address its economic challenges
Why Leadership Matters

• Strong consensus amongst researchers and policy makers that place based leadership matters. Improved:
  – Capacity to set a vision for the future
    • Increases the likelihood of achieving that vision and securing an economic future
    • Positions the community within global markets
  – Flexibility and resilience when confronted by change
    • Reduces exposure to path dependence
  – Social and institutional capital
    • Strengthened through practice and use
  – Vertical relations with government, and horizontal relations with partners and other stakeholders
What Do we Know About Leadership in Cities and Regions?

• The leadership of cities and regions is more complex than in linear organisations such as corporations or governments
  – It’s a property of groups not individuals
  – Based on mutual trust and collaboration

• Good leadership is:
  – Agenda setting and task oriented
  – Pays attention to the socio-emotional side of internal group dynamics and engagement with external stakeholders
  – A coalition of stakeholders (Lions not leopards)
    • more likely to both deliver change and stability in leadership
What Do we Know About Leadership in Cities and Regions?

• Good Leadership is (continued)
  – Multi-faceted
    • No one style of effective leadership
      – ‘quiet leaders’, charismatic leaders, socially embedded leaders, subversive leaders
  – Built on on-going interactions with other stakeholders
  – Adequately resourced
    • The importance of ‘slack resources’
  – Found in all parts of the community
    • Volunteer business leaders, elected leaders & amongst professional staff
Leading by Talking, Leading by Doing
Case Studies

• Academic and popular understanding of place-leadership is heavily reliant on case studies. But,
  – Too great a focus on ‘good news’
  – The challenge of ‘contingency theory’
    • That effective leadership will arise if a city or community is confronted by a major challenge
  – Are these insights transferrable?
    • Impact of systems of government
    • ‘Great person’ models of leadership
      – The Beechworth Baker
Case Studies
Case Study: Southern Adelaide
Case Study: La Trobe Valley
Is Good Leadership Universal?

• No
  – Leadership in any form is not universal
    • Highly centralised systems of government challenge the formation and expression of city or regional leadership
      – Australia, UK, Germany etc
    • Decentralised systems of power sharing are more likely to encourage local leaders
      – US Federal system, EU principle of subsidiarity

• No
  – Leadership roles can be used to concentrate power and influence within a segment of the community
  – Leadership groups can be distanced from their communities
  – Can make poor decisions, or fail to act
How Can Leadership be Mobilised?

• Central governments, cities and regions can all contribute to creating an institutional structure conducive to regional formation
  – Share power
    • Across tiers of government, the private sector and the community
  – Establish appropriate institutions
    • Ensure leadership efforts are adequately resourced
  – Engage with all sections of the community
    • Accept and value difference, but build a cohesive leadership group
    • Public, private and institutional members
    • It needs to be a collective and collaborative effort, and not all individuals can work in those environments
How Can Leadership be Mobilised?

– Set goals and review them
  • Task orientation, outcomes focus

– Develop the leadership group
  • Exposure to knowledge, leadership training, new concepts
    – Provide opportunities to practice leadership

– Renew the leadership group
  • Succession planning
  • Seek diverse skills and experience
Conclusions

• Perhaps 10-20% of cities and regions enjoy effective leadership
  – These deficits reflect both a failure to understand the leadership of cities and regions, and in some instances, an unwillingness to see leadership emerge

• Greater understanding can - and will - empower cities and regions to shape their future

• Policy efforts – nationally and supra nationally – that place priority on city and regional leadership will have significant impacts